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THE VALENTINIAN CLAIM TO ESOTERIC EXEGESIS OF ROMANS AS BASIS FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

BY

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ABSTRACT

Investigation of Valentinian exegesis of *Romans* indicates that certain gnostic theologians claim to have developed their anthropological theory from an esoteric exegesis of *Romans*. While most Christians read the epistle "literally", as Paul's discussion of the contrast between the revelation to Israel and the revelation in Christ, these exegetes read it allegorically.

Accordingly, they claim, what Paul describes as the situation of "the Jews" who stand "in the law" (cf. Rm. 2.12; 3.19), subject to "sin" and "death" (8.2 f.) allegorically describes the situation of *psychic Christians*. They, as "Jews", worship the "God of the Jews" (3.29), the demiurge, whose law requires them to earn their salvation "from works" (4.2).

Conversely, Paul's discussion of the "Gentiles", who, "outside the law", have in their hearts the "law by nature" (2.12–15) describes the situation of the *pneumatics*. These receive redemption entirely "apart from the law" (3.21), "without works" (3.28). They are the elect foreordained by the Father (8.29 f.), redeemed "through faith", "according to grace" (3.21–30).

This analysis suggests that the traditional framework for interpreting gnostic anthropology – either in terms of "determinism" (Bultmann, 1941) or of "free will" (L. Schottroff, 1969) – proves inadequate. Such anthropological terms as the "natures" (φύσις) or their designation as "hylic/psychic/pneumatic" instead are intended to present a modified theory of election, allegedly Pauline. They are intended to differentiate between the *psychics' salvation*, effected by choice "through works", on the one hand, and the *pneumatics' redemption* through divine election on the other — an election received "through faith", and "by grace".

Now that the Nag Hammadi texts are becoming available, we anticipate the possibility of gaining from them new insights for the analysis of gnostic anthropology. As the investigation of these texts proceeds, however, it becomes crucial to reëxamine the presuppositions of our investigation.

Are we to approach these texts, for example, in terms of the traditional view of gnostic anthropology – the view Bultmann has expounded in 1941? Bultmann has claimed that the gnostic terminology of the "natures" (φύσεις) of men teaches a kind of natural determinism. So, he says, the gnostics teach that "redemption occurs as a great natural process ... the

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destiny of the soul is determined through its φύσις."[1] Their anthropology, Bultmann declares, excludes human freedom and human choice:

> Faith is not genuine decision, but recognition of one's mythical origin ... the gnostic is one who is already φύσει σωζόμενος, and the unbeliever is, on the basis of his evil φύσις, already lost."[2]

This view, of course, has not originated with Bultmann; it is the traditional view of gnostic anthropology that has been taken for granted in the works of such scholars as Henrici, Förster, Von Loewenich, and Sagnard. It claims, indeed, the authorization of Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen, who agree that the gnostics teach a doctrine of "saved and lost natures"[3] – in effect, a substantive determinism.

H. Langerbeck and L. Schottroff, challenging this view in 1967 and 1969, have offered an opposite interpretation of Valentinian anthropology.[4] They suggest that the interpretation of the φύσις language as "deterministic" actually *caricatures* gnostic anthropology. This polemical caricature, they claim, has been mistaken by historians for a *description.* Schottroff concludes from her analysis that the terminology of the three "natures", far from assuming a "substantive determinism" that excludes free will, is intended to describe the different modes of human existence as they are *constituted* by free will. So, in her words,

> "Hyle, psyche, and pneuma are definitions of essence (Wesensbestimmungen) that describe the essence (Wesen) of mankind in relation to the poles of the dualism – salvation and perdition ... each one to be saved is defined through hyle, psyche, and pneuma ... The pneumatic is not exempted from the rôle of the psychic; he must decide himself on the basis of free will for salvation or perdition."[5]

Investigation of gnostic (and especially Valentinian)[6] exegesis of *Romans* indicates, however, that to analyze gnostic anthropology in terms of *either* of these alternatives proves misleading. The philosophical question of determinism and free will is not the issue that motivates the development of gnostic anthropology. Our analysis indicates that, as Quispel has suggested, the Valentinian description of the "natures" emerges not from a philosophical determinism so much as from a

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[1] R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen 1941/62) 21–24; see also 96f.; 114.

[2] Bultmann, 240.

[3] *Excerpta ex Theod.* 56.3; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 2.10.2; 4.89; Iren. *Adv. haer.* 1.1.11; 1.6.1; Origen, *De princ.* 3.4f.; *Comm. Jo.* 2.14f.

[4] H. Langerbeck, *Aufsätze zur Gnosis* (Göttingen 1967) 38f.; L. Schottroff, Animae naturaliter salvandae, in *Christentum und Gnosis*, ed. W. Eltester (Berlin 1969) 65f.

[5] Schottroff, 92–93.

[6] See comment by H.-Ch. Puech and G. Quispel, Le Quatrième Ecrit du Codex Jung, *Vigiliae Christianae* 9 (1955) 73, note 1.

theology of election.[7] More specifically, it indicates that the Valentinians have developed their description of the hylic, psychic, and pneumatic "natures", as they themselves claim,[8] as an exegetical interpretation of Paul's election-theology.

Fragments of Valentinian exegesis, notably that of Valentinus, Ptolemaeus, Theodotus, and Heracleon, are preserved in the accounts of Irenaeus and Hippolytus, in the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, in sections of Clement and Origen's exegetical discussions,[9] and in such writings as the *Evangelium Veritatis*. Valentinian exegesis, of course, has been attacked both by the heresiologists and by scholars who follow their lead, of being "arbitrary and contrived".[10] When the extant fragments of such exegesis are analyzed comparatively, however, they evince a remarkable degree of unanimity and coherence – a coherence both methodological and theological. The following analysis emerges from such a comparative study – in this case, of the exegetical fragments on *Romans*.

The Valentinians claim to base their anthropology, and the terminology of the "natures" that interprets it, upon an esoteric interpretation of "scripture" – especially of the gospel of *John* and the letters of Paul. Every phrase in these writings, apparently, has received a symbolic interpretation in their exegesis. For the purpose of investigating their exegesis as it elucidates their view of the three "natures", we limit ourselves here to sketching the basic outline of their exegesis of *Romans* 1-4.

These exegetes claim that most Christians make the mistake of reading "the scriptures", (in this case, *Romans*) only *literally*.[11] The Valentinian agrees with other Christians that Paul's concern in *Romans* is to contrast that salvation effected "by works", "according to the law", with the redemption the elect receive *apart* from works and law, "by grace", and

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[7] G. Quispel, La Conception de l'homme dans la Gnose Valentinienne, *Eranos Jahrbuch* 15 (1947) 249–286.

[8] Cf. Iren. *Adv. haer.* 1.3.5–6.

[9] Cf. fragments of Heracleon's exegesis preserved in Clement's *Strom.*, in Origen's *Commentary on John* (ed. E. Preuschen, GCS 10); also sections of Valentinian exegesis present in *De princ.* (ed. P. Koetschau, GCS 5); and especially the fragments of his *Commentary on Romans*, ed. J. Scherer, *Le Commentaire d'Origène sur Rom.* 3.5–5.7 (Cairo 1957).

[10] Iren. *Adv. haer.* 1.11.1; Or. *Comm. Jo.* 2.21; C. Barth, *Die Interpretation des Neuen Testaments in der Valentinianischer Gnosis*, TU 37 (1911) 46; W. von Loewenich, *Das Johannes-Verständnis im Zweiten Jahrhundert* (Giessen 1932) 76, refers to "die Willkür der Gnostiker in der Exegese"; J. N. Sanders, *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge 1943) 62f.

[11] Heracleon, *Commentary on John* 13.19 (hereafter cited as *Comm. Jo.*).

"through faith". But most Christians read the epistle only in terms of the contrast between the revelation to the Jews, and the revelation in Christ. They fail to see what Paul clearly states – that he does not intend the term "Jew" to be taken literally. It is to be taken "spiritually", that is, symbolically, as he himself says in Rm. 2.28f.: "He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly ... (but) he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart, pneumatic, and not literal." The Valentinian takes this verse as an injunction to symbolic exegesis. While Paul discusses, then, on a literal and exoteric level, the relation of Jews to Christians, he intends his words to be read *also* on a "pneumatic" and esoteric level. According to such pneumatic exegesis, the terms "Jew" and "Gentile" are understood to refer allegorically to different groups of *Christians* – to psychic and pneumatic Christians respectively.

So, according to this exegesis, those Christians who are called "Jews", or "Jews outwardly", are those who worship the "God of the Jews" (Rm. 3.29) – a term taken technically for the *demiurge*. They follow the "law" of the demiurge, who is also called "lawgiver", or "Moses", as in the phrase "law of Moses". For as the term "Jew" is not to be taken literally, so the name "Moses" is not to be taken literally, as if it referred to an actual historical person. The name "Moses", like the other names of OT figures, is understood to refer allegorically to the demiurge.[12] The different personal names designate different aspects of his activity. So, when the demiurge appears as ruler (as in 1.3) he is represented as David; when, as in 4.1, he appears as "forefather" of mankind "according to the flesh", he is represented as Abraham; when (according to Heracleon's exegesis of Rm. 13.1f., for example[13]) he appears as "lawgiver", he is represented as Moses.

Those called "Jews outwardly", then, are the *psychics*, who according to 2.27, are those who stand provisionally (i.e., during the oikonomia) "in the law". They receive the "literal circumcision" (2.29) that signifies their relation to the demiurge. They are obligated to keep his law (cf. 3.19) and stand under the penalty of death for sins; for "the soul (that is, the *psychic*) that sins shall die".[14]

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[12] *Comm. Jo.* 20.38, on "Moses" as the demiurge; 3.10, "Jacob" as the demiurge; 13.60, "Abraham" as the demiurge; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.34.4, explains that, according to the Valentinians, προέβαλε καὶ ὁ δημιουργὸς ψυχάς· αὕτη γὰρ οὐσία ψυχῶν· οὗτός ἐστι κατ' αὐτοὺς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ ταῦτα τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ τὰ τέκνα.

[13] *Comm. Jo.* 20.38.

[14] *Comm. Jo.* 13.60: Heracleon cites Mt. 10.28 to show that psychics are "by nature" mortal; then cites Rm. 7.13 to show that they stand under the "law" which

Yet Paul continues in 2.28: "He is (truly) a Jew, who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart, pneumatic, not literal." Those called "Jews inwardly", the Valentinian explains, are the *pneumatics*. They worship not the "God of the Jews", not the demiurge, but the "one God" of 3.29, who is called "God of the Gentiles", the Uningendered Father.[15] Because their affinity with the Father is hidden from the demiurge and from psychics, Paul calls the pneumatics the "uncircumcised", and represents them allegorically as the "Gentiles" (2.29) or as the "Greeks" (1.14).

Once we grasp the technical meaning of these terms for gnostic exegesis, we can understand how the Valentinians read Paul's *esoteric* meaning when in Rm. 1.5 he proclaims himself the "apostle to the Gentiles". Origen's exegetical opponents note here that in Gal. 2.7 Paul contrasts his own mission to the "Gentiles" (that is, to the pneumatics) with Peter's mission to the "Jews" (to the psychics).[16] As apostle to the "Gentiles", Paul says in Rm. 1.11 that he longs to share with them his "pneumatic charisma". Nevertheless he acknowledges in 1.14 that he is obligated both to "the Greeks and to the barbarians", as he explains, "to the wise" (the pneumatics) and to the "foolish" (psychics). (It is for this reason, presumably, that he hides his pneumatic meaning in allegory.)

The Valentinian exegete can explain, then, from Rm. 1.21, how the psychics, the "foolish", have become "futile in their imagination", so that "their foolish heart was darkened". This occurred apparently, in the process of cosmic creation. In that process, as Valentinus explains from Rm. 1.20, the demiurge was formed as an "image" of the "living aion".[17] For although "what is known of God", the "invisible things of God, His holy power and divinity ... are perceived clearly ... in the things that are made", the *psychics* are those who become incapable of perceiving the Invisible One. Therefore they have become "foolish", and "unperceiving", for, as Valentinus explains with reference to Rm. 1.23, they have "exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God" for an "image" of the "corruptible anthropos" – this "image" being the demiurge. Theodotus confirms this interpretation of the demiurge as the "image" of the Father; Irenaeus explains more specifically that the Valentinians call the

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prescribes death for "sins"; and finally he cites 1 Cor. 15.53f. to show that psychics, although "mortal", can "put on immortality".

[15] Scherer, 168f.

[16] Cf. Scherer, 176; Iren. *Adv. haer.* 3.13.1–3.14.1.

[17] Clem. Al. *Strom.* 4.89.6–90.1.

demiurge, as "image of the anthropos", the "image of the monogenes".[18]

So also, according to vs. 25, they have "exchanged the truth of God" (τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ) for a "lie" – apparently, in Valentinian terms, for the principle of falsehood and materiality, the devil.[19] As a result they now worship the "image", the demiurge, instead of the Invisible One; they worship the "creation and not the creator" who is "blessed among the aions". (Irenaeus explains that the Valentinians consistently interpret the term *aion* or *aiones* in reference to the pleromic aions. They can claim, therefore, that Paul makes frequent and specific reference to the *aions*, as they would claim he does here.[20]) Instead of worshipping the One who is among the aions, then, those who are psychic now worship the "creation", a term that Theodotus, Basilides, and Heracleon take (as a parallel to the term "image") as an epithet for the demiurge. He is, as Theodotus says, himself only the "creation" of the higher powers.[21] Heracleon, likewise, explains from Rm. 1.25 that the "Jews", that is, the psychics, "worship the creation" – the demiurge – and not, in his words, "the true creator", who is the Logos, as he explains from Jn. 1.3.[22] Basilides, in a parallel exegesis, explains that the "creation" of Rm. 8.22, which "groans and labors in travail" signifies the Great Archon, who now suffers the agony of his present ignorance.[23]

In vs. 26 Paul goes on to relate that God "gave up" the creature into the "*pathe* of dishonor", so that the "females" exchanged their "natural affinity" (τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν) with the "males" for what was "contrary to nature" (παρὰ φύσιν) and the males likewise abandoned their affinity with the females. This inappropriate situation (τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην) has occurred, according to vs. 27, through error (τῆς πλάνης).

The Valentinian exegete, again, would reject *a priori* any "literal" exegesis of the passage. He would refuse, for example, to refer it to the

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[18] Iren. *Adv. haer.* 1.1.9; 2.5.2; demiurge as "image" (εἰκών) of the *monogenes*; *Exc.* 47.3, as "image of the Father" (εἰκὼν πατρός).

[19] *Comm. Jo.* 20.28.

[20] Iren. *Adv. haer.* 1.3.1.

[21] *Exc.* 47.3.

[22] *Comm. Jo.* 13.19. Heracleon says that the "Jews" worship "the one who is not the Father", and refers to Rm. 1.25: "they worshipped the *creation* and not the true creator (τῇ κτίσει παρὰ τὸν κτίσαντα)." See also 13.16: Heracleon explains that "the Jews" worship "the creation or the creator", pointing out that the two terms can be distinguished or can serve as equivalents, both characterizing the worship of the psychic "Jews" in contrast to the pneumatics' worship of "neither the creation (κτίσει) nor the demiurge, but the Father of truth".

[23] Hippol. *Refut.* 7.25.1–27.1.

degeneration of mankind into the sexual errors of homosexuality and prostitution. Although we lack an extant Valentinian exegesis of the passage, we may recognize in this passage five terms that bear technical meaning in Valentinian theology, namely: πάθη; ἄρρην/θῆλυς; φύσις; ἀσχημοσύνη; πλάνη. By examining the use of these terms in extant texts, and by comparing the results of this examination with an extant Naassene exegesis of Rm. 1.20-27, we may suggest how a Valentinian could read this passage (for discussion, see footnote 24).

Such an examination suggests that Valentinian exegesis of vs. 26–27 should show how God (the Father) has yielded the creatures "into" *pathe* – that is, into the elements from which the material cosmos was formed. In the process, the "male" and "female" elements of "the seed" became separated from each other, violating the "nature" (φύσις) of each. The exegete should indicate, furthermore, how this "inappropriate situation" (ἀσχημοσύνη) has occurred through "error" – through the *plane* that operates in cosmic creation.

A striking parallel to this proposed exegesis of Rm. 1.20–27 occurs in a Naassene text. The Naassenes interpret this passage as a description of the "fall" of the primal Anthropos. The Anthropos was, they say, citing Paul, hermaphroditic, "neither male nor female" (Gal. 3.28), being formed of the primal invisible *ousia*. When, however, the Anthropos, through *plane*, came into the *pathe*, the invisible *ousia* taking on the "forms" of material existence, the male and female elements of the seed suffered "unnatural" division. This situation, the exegete explains, is what is meant by ἀσχημοσύνη. The exegesis concludes with the statement

[24] In the phrase πάθη ἀτιμίας the Valentinian could recognize a reference to the elements, the πάθη, from which the present cosmos was formed (cf. *Adv. haer.* 1.1.7; *Exc.* 47.1). The resultant confusion and alienation of the "females" from the "males" would recall the representation of the element of the "seed" that has fallen into the psychic topos as "female" (*Comm. Jo.* 6.20; 13.10–11; *Exc.* 21.1–3; 40). *Exc.* 21.1 explains how the hermaphroditic unity of the Anthropos has suffered division of the "female" from the "male", which represents that element of the "seed" which remains pneumatic (*Exc.* 2.1; 40). As a result, the female element of the seed now exists in a material condition "contrary to its nature" (οὐ κατὰ φύσιν ἔχων), according to Heracleon, and the pneumatic element of the seed has "been destroyed in deep matter" (*Comm. Jo.* 13.60; 13.10–11). The resulting situation in which the two elements of the seed, male and female, have suffered division, Heracleon calls ἀσχημοσύνη. Like Paul in Rm. 1.27b, Heracleon attributes this situation to the instrumentality of error (πλάνη) (*Comm. Jo.* 13.20). From other sources as well (as from Valentinus' exegesis of the passage (*Strom.* 4. 89f.) and from *Evangelium Veritatis*) one can observe how the Valentinians could read in this passage reference to the role of πλάνη in cosmic creation.

that in these words Paul has described the Naassenes' "entire secret, and a hidden mystery".[25]

If, as we suggest, the Valentinian exegete reads the passage in a similar way, he may conclude from verse 28 that the Father gave up his creatures to an "opposing mind" – in Valentinian terms, to the devil, principle of materiality –[26] and subjected them to "his servant" – that is, to the demiurge.[27] Now that the two elements of the "seed" have become separated in cosmic existence, they give rise to two different types (γένη) of human being or human experience in the present *oikonomia* – to those characterized as *pneumatic* and *psychic*. The psychics, alternatively called the "female seed", remain oblivious to this "secret", and perceive only the demiurge, who appears to rule over all mankind, and to impose his "law" on "all alike" (cf. Rm. 3.19). The pneumatics, however, who are of the "male, angelic seed", receive the "secret of the *anthropos*" (Rm. 2.16). This "secret", belonging to those who are "Jews in secret", reveals that their affinity is not with the demiurge but with the Father. Unlike the psychics, who remain under the demiurge's jurisdiction and his law, the pneumatics are actually, secretly, *exempt* from his jurisdiction and from his law. Heracleon explains that it is "every soul" (πᾶσα ψυχή), that is, every *psychic*, who is enjoined to remain subject to the "higher powers" (Rm. 13.1 f.) and to "Moses" the demiurge. According to Origen, the Valentinian exegete of Romans concludes from this that the psychics alone comprise the "cosmos" that Paul says is "to be judged" (3.6; 3.19).

The whole paradigm of *law*, *sins*, *fear*, and *judgment*, according to Valentinian exegesis, applies only to the "Jews", that is, to psychics. So Paul explains in 3.19: "We know that what the law says it says to those in the law" – to the psychic "Jews" – "so that the whole *cosmos*" – that is, the totality of psychics – "may become liable before God." As the exegete explains, the idea of *sins*, *liability*, and *judgment* emerge dialectically with the idea of *law*. He infers this from 3.21, where Paul himself says that "the consciousness of sin comes through the law".[28]

Conversely, where there is no idea of law, there can be no idea of sins,

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[25] Hippol. *Ref.* 5.7.19.

[26] *Comm. Jo.* 13.16; 20.28; *Exc.* 52.1–53.1.

[27] Cf. Heracleon's exegesis of Rm. 13.1f.; every psychic (πᾶσα ψυχή) is warned to obey the "servant of God", the demiurge, in 13.4 who is also called "Moses", and "judge", bearing wrath for those (psychics) who do evil. *Comm. Jo.* 20.38.

[28] The Valentinian opponent of Origen considers the question of how such an interrpetation can be sustained in view of the apparently universal reference of, for

liability, or judgment. Therefore the pneumatics, being "Gentiles", and not "in the law", are exempt from this whole paradigm. As evidence, the exegete cites 4.15: "Where there is no law, there is no transgression," and 5.13: "sin is not accounted where there is no law."[29] The pneumatics, then, are represented as those "Gentiles", who, according to 2.14, "not having the law, do by nature (φύσει) the things in the law. They are themselves law, having the effect of the law written on their hearts." While the psychics only become aware of sin externally, "through the law", the pneumatics become aware "by nature", internally, of its effect "written on their hearts". This inner, "natural law" to which "their own conscience bears witness", however, differs entirely from the *demiurge*'s law, the so-called "law of Moses". The pneumatic, with Paul, according to Rm. 7.22–23, "delights in the law of *God*" – of the Father, not the demiurge – "according to the inner *anthropos*". Here we note a consistent characteristic of Valentinian exegesis: as the term *cosmos* technically designates the psychics, so the term *anthropos* technically designates the pneumatics.[30] According to the Valentinian reading of 3.5, then Paul is asking whether God could be so unjust as to bear wrath "against the *anthropon*".[31] Could He judge the "Gentiles" according to the "law of Moses"? Paul answers that this is impossible; if God were indeed so unjust, how could he judge the *cosmos*? Clearly, then, the "law of Moses" applies only to the psychic *cosmos*, to the "Jews", and not to the pneumatic *anthropos*, who are the "Gentiles". The Valentinian exegete explains, then, that as psychics are related to the "God of the Jews", the demiurge, through the "law of Moses", which is the "literal circumcision of the flesh" (2.28), so the pneumatics are related "by nature" to the "God

example, Rm. 3.9, where Paul says that the demiurges' law accuses "all alike", both "Jews" and "Greeks", both psychics and pneumatics, of being "under sin". To answer this, the exegete has explained that the terminology of the following verses (3.10–18) demonstrates that the law applies only to psychics. They alone can be called in vs. 10 "unjust", since pneumatics cannot be judged according to the criterion of justice. Psychics alone could be called "lacking intelligence", those "not seeking God". The pneumatics are characterized, conversely, as the "wise"; and even in the state of alienation, continually "seek" the Father (*Adv. haer.* 1.1.2; *Comm. Jo.* 13.27–28). Finally, only psychics could be chastised in vs. 18 for not "fearing" God. Fear characterizes their relation as "Jews" to their Lord, while knowledge (γνῶσις) and love characterize the pneumatics' relation to their God and Father, whom they love in the "perfect love" that "casts out fear" (1 Jn. 4.18). Cf. Scherer, 130f.

[29] Cf. Scherer, 136; 200–202.

[30] Cf. *Comm. Jo.* 2.21; also Origen's argument against this technical interpretation of *anthropos*, Scherer, 124f.

[31] Scherer, 126.

of the Gentiles", the "Uningendered Father", through the inner, natural law which is the "pneumatic circumcision of the heart".

The exegete places this passage in parallel with 2 Cor. 3.1f., where Paul describes the "new" pneumatic covenant which abolishes the "old" covenant of literal law. There also, he claims, Paul explains how the psychic "sons of Israel" remain bound to the "service of death".[32] They remain unable to see the face of "Moses", of the demiurge, since "their minds were blinded". "Even now," Paul says, "the veil is upon their hearts,"[33] preventing the psychics from perceiving the pneumatic revelation. Paul adds in 2 Cor. 4.3 that if his pneumatic gospel is "veiled", it is "veiled" only "to those who are perishing", whose "minds have been blinded" by "the God of this cosmos". But those who are the communication "written on our hearts" perceive what Paul says is "known and recognized by all *anthropoi*", that is, by all pneumatics. What they know is that they share in a "new covenant", written not in literal terms, but in "the *pneuma* of the Living God". This new covenant, unlike the old, sets no requirements, but freely conveys divine grace, as Paul says in 2 Cor. 3.5:

> "... not that we ourselves are considered worthy of anything, as for ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who makes us worthy servants of the new covenant, which is not of the letter but of the *pneuma*."

While the psychics, then, being "Jews", stand "in the law", Paul says in 3.28 "we reason that the *anthropos* is justified through faith *apart from* the works of the law." And it is to the *anthropos*, that is, to the pneumatic, Paul says that "now the righteousness of God apart from the law has been revealed" (3.22). In the following verse, the exegete sees Paul drawing the same distinction. For those whom Paul says have "all sinned", must be the psychics, who stand under the law and under sin. But those who have "lacked the glory of God", must be the pneumatics, who although they have not "sinned", have lacked the "glory" of the Father.[34] It is the pneumatics, then, who, according to 3.24, are "justified as a gift of His grace (τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι) through the redemption (τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως) that is in Christ". The exegete infers from this that Paul intends to distinguish the pneumatic *redemption* (ἀπολύτρωσις) from the *salvation* (σωτηρία) that psychics must strive to attain through the law. The basis for this distinction Paul reveals in 3.25: for "what God foreordained as a

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[32] Scherer, 174–176; 204.

[33] Hippol. 6.35: Hippolytus relates that, according to Valentinian exegesis of 2 Cor. 3.1–5 the ψύχικός (1 Cor. 2.14) is said "even now" to have the "veil" on his heart.

[34] Scherer, 166f.

reconciliation through faith" does not refer, as the psychics assume, to the death of Jesus. "What the Father foreordained" is the *pneumatic elect* – foreordained "to manifest His righteousness", since He redeems the elect by His grace.[35] Therefore Paul asks (3.27) "Where is boasting?" and answers that "it is excluded. By what law (νόμος)? The law of works? No – but through the law of faith."

Accordingly, the exegete concludes, Paul intends his allegory of "Jews" and "Gentiles" to characterize two distinct processes. The psychics, being "under sin", are bound to the "law of works". To escape the penalty of death for sins, they do need faith, but theirs is specifically "faith in Jesus" (3.26) in the psychic son of the demiurge, who offers them "forgiveness of sins". Those who repent and believe are forgiven, and admonished to do "good works". For the process of their salvation depends on their own choice and on their own activity: it operates according to what Paul calls the "law of works".

The pneumatics, on the other hand, being of the elect, receive redemption entirely "according to grace", in the "law of faith" – faith not in the psychic Jesus but in the pneumatic Christ.[36] Unlike the works-salvation of the psychics the pneumatic redemption *excludes* all human effort (and hence all "boasting"), as it depends entirely upon divine election. Therefore Paul asks in 3.29, "is God (to be understood as) only the 'God of the Jews'?" – that is, as the demiurge? Is He not also the "God of the Gentiles", of the pneumatics – that is the Uningendered Father, who alone can be called the "one God"?[37] Paul concludes in 3.29–30 that the "one God", the Father, "justifies the circumcised" (the psychic) "*from* faith" (ἐκ πίστεως) and the "uncircumcised" (the pneumatic) "*through* faith" (διὰ τῆς πίστεως).[38] For the psychic's faith is limited, and his salvation must come "from works" (4.2) as well as "from faith". The

[35] Scherer, 158–162.

[36] The Valentinian exegete takes Rm. 3.26, apparently, as a reference to the psychic who "believes in *Jesus*", on the one hand, and 3.22–24 in reference to the pneumatic who is redeemed "through faith" in *Christ*.

[37] Scherer, 168 f.

[38] Origin's opponent correlates these phrases (ἐκ πίστεως / διὰ τῆς πίστεως with an esoteric exegesis of 1 Cor. 11.12 (ὥσπερ γὰρ ἡ γυνὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός, οὕτως καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ διὰ τῆς γυναικός) that they say refers to the generation of psychics (as ἡ γυνή) and pneumatics (ὁ ἀνήρ) respectively. As the psychic element (ἡ γυνή) comes ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός, from Adam, so she is saved ἐκ πίστεως. Conversely, as the pneumatic element comes διὰ τῆς γυναικός, that is "through Eve", figure of Sophia, so he is redeemed διὰ τῆς πίστεως. See discussion by Origen, Scherer, 170 f. Cf. Gal. 3.7, 3.26.

pneumatic, on the other hand, is redeemed "*through* faith", since his redemption depends not on himself at all but only of the will of the Father who elects him. Paul concludes in 3.31 that the pneumatics "abolish the law *through faith*". Yet he can claim simultaneously in 3.32 to "establish the law", since although the law is abolished in relation to the pneumatics, it is sustained in relation to the psychics.[39]

Having set forth this clear distinction between the psychics' *salvation* and the pneumatic *redemption*, Paul asks in ch. 4 about "our father Abraham according to the flesh" – that is, in Valentinian symbology, about the demiurge, the psychic generator of mankind, who "forms" their physical constitution. Is the demiurge justified "from works" like the psychics, or "through faith" like the pneumatics? The exegete shows from Rm. 4.3 that Abraham, the demiurge, "believed God" – the Father – and therefore his faith "was accounted for righteousness". Here Origen accuses his exegetical opponents of presupposing a distinction between the demiurge and "the God they call good". They claim, Origen says, that "the Jews" do *not* believe in "the God in whom Abraham believed", who is the One God, the Father. Therefore, the gnostics conclude, they "lack a faith like Abraham's", and lacking his faith in the Father, they ignorantly worship the demiurge *himself* as their god.[40] While the demiurge believes in the Father, so that he is justified "through faith", the psychics, who worship only the "creation" and "image" of God, the demiurge, therefore remain bound to his law, which is the "law of works".

The Valentinian exegete sees Paul drawing the consequence of this in Rm. 4.4–5: "To the one who works" – that is, to the psychic – "the reward is accounted not according to grace but according to obligation." Psychics, then, are bound to earn salvation "from works" as the "reward" of their own effort. But, according to 4.5, "to the one who does not work" – to the pneumatic – but "believes on Him who justifies the unholy" – on the Father – "his faith is accounted for righteousness".

As evidence, Paul cites the testimony on "David" in Ps. 32.1–2. The Valentinian, as suggested above, sees "David" as a figure for the demiurge. In the words of his witness the exegete sees the same contrast expressed:

> 4.7: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered;
> 4.8: blessed is the man (*anthropos*) to whom the Lord does not impute sin."

To whom do these phrases apply? Since Paul himself says in 4.15 that

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[39] Scherer, 174f.
[40] Scherer, 220f.

"where there is no law, there is no transgression," and in 5.13 that "sin is not accounted where there is not law," the description in 4.7 of those who have *transgressed* and *sinned* cannot apply to the pneumatic "Gentiles". The first phrase, then, must apply to the psychics, and specifically to those psychics who have received forgiveness, whose "sins are covered". The second phrase, describing the one "to whom the Lord does not impute sin", however, can only refer to the pneumatic. This identification is confirmed by the description of the "blessed man" in 4.8 as *anthropos* – that term technically used, as we have seen, to designate the pneumatic elect. To make this even clearer, Paul has introduced this verse in 4.6 as describing the "blessedness of the *anthropos* whom God accounts righteous apart from works".

A third textual clue serves to establish, for the Valentinian, this interpretation. He notes that the first phrase, 4.7, refers to those "forgiven" in the plural. According to the presuppositions of Valentinian theology, the *plural* characteristically connotes the psychics, who constitute a plurality; for the psychics (according to Theodotus and Heracleon) are "the many".[41] The second phrase, however, refers to the "blessed anthropos" in the *singular*, establishing its reference to the pneumatic elect, who constitute, in Heracleon's words, the "unique, unified, single formed nature" of the elect. (In the same way, the demiurge, as "servant" of the higher powers, is described as being "of many", specifically *not* singular; while the Father remains uniquely the "One God" who always is described in the singular.)[42]

Paul goes on to stress in 4.9–11 that Abraham, the demiurge, has received justifying faith and the promise of blessing while he was, like the pneumatic elect, "still uncircumcised". In receiving his justification "through faith", then, he becomes the father – not only of "his own", the psychic "Jews", but also (vs. 12) of the "uncircumcised" – the pneumatics, who "bear the traces of our father Abraham's faith, which was his in the state of uncircumcision".

In 4.16, Paul adds that Abraham, the demiurge, believed "in spite of the deadness of Sarah's womb" – an image that apparently refers to Sophia's abortion, which brought forth the "deadness" of materiality in cosmic existence,[43] as it also brought forth the "dead" – that is, the

[41] *Comm. Jo.* 13.51; *Exc.* 56.2.
[42] *Comm. Jo.* 13.50; *Exc.* 53.1.
[43] Scherer, 214f.; *Exc.* 80.1.

psychics. The promise that the demiurge received from the Father, however, was given, as Paul explains in 4.13, "to Abraham and to *his seed*". Who can this mean? The exegete notes, first, that the "seed" cannot be the "dead", it cannot refer to the psychics generated from Sophia. The "seed" must be the "living", and therefore the *pneumatic* seed.[44] Secondly, since the promise is said to be "certain", it can be given only to the "elect seed". For if the promise depended on human effort, as Paul explains, it could not be utterly "certain": therefore it must depend on God's will in election alone.[45] Third, the promise is given "through faith", and "according to grace", as the elect alone can receive it. Finally, referring to Gal. 3.16–17, the exegete notes that "Abraham's seed" specifically is described in the singular and not in the plural, as being "not as of many" (as of the psychics) but "of one", establishing its reference to the pneumatic elect. Nevertheless, as Theodotus explains from Rm. 11.25–26, the "many" shall become "one" when the "Jews" and the "Gentiles", the "called" and the "elect" finally are restored together into unity and harmony with each other and with the Father.[46]

What motivates the Valentinian theologians to develop this theological anthropology and the hermeneutical discipline whereby it claims Pauline authority? Are we really convinced, as we so often have been told, that their concern is purely "speculative" and theoretical?

We suggest, on the contrary, that their theology emerges primarily out of their concern to articulate their experience of redemption – the experience of having received justification "according to grace". They claim not to present any new doctrine, but rather to expound the theology of election and grace they claim to find in Paul. His election-language expresses, they say, the same pneumatic experience. Those who apprehend and share in this experience – and they encourage others to do so – they include with themselves as being "of pneumatic nature", or, in other words, as members of "the elect".

Secondarily, they are concerned to oppose the attempt of the Christian majority to place the "gospel of Christ" in continuity with Jewish religion rather than in contrast to it, as they believe Paul has done. They are reacting against what they see as a moralizing of the gospel, and against

[44] Scherer, 170.

[45] Scherer, 206f.

[46] Cf. *Exc.* 58.1. The question of Valentinian eschatology is to be discussed in a forthcoming article: "Conflicting Versions of Valentinian Eschatology: Irenaeus' Treatise vs. the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*".

those who preach about "Jesus" in terms of *law*, *sins*, *forgiveness*, and *works*. Such psychic preaching only can interpret the experience of conversion in terms of ethical choice and action – in terms of the "law of works". Those who are "of psychic nature", apprehending salvation as psychics, can, they admit, attain to salvation, but remain on a lower level of experience and insight. Elected neither to grace nor to reprobation, they can achieve "through works" a *relation* with God as creator and Lord, but fail to attain *reunion* with God as Father.

Yet the psychic description of the process of salvation fails to interpret the experience of the pneumatic redemption. The pneumatic does not experience himself as one who, having heard the preaching, is "called" to "repent his sins" and "believe in Jesus", to "receive forgiveness", and to turn to "good works". Instead he experiences the encounter with Christ as a recognition of his own, hidden, unknown, true identity – an identity which he realizes cannot be achieved through "works", or his own effort, but which he receives as freely "given". Nor can his experience be described as an act of his own choice or decision. On the contrary, he is aware of "having been chosen". He anticipates not "salvation" as his "reward", but reunion with the Father as the gift of divine grace.

The Valentinians see in *Romans*, then, Paul's description of that pneumatic experience of justification "by grace", and note how he contrasts it with the "works-salvation" of "the Jews". Since Paul himself enjoins them to exegete pneumatically, not literally, they conclude that he intends to represent through this allegory of the "Gentiles" and the "Jews" those who, on the one hand, are "of pneumatic nature" being the elect, and those who are "of psychic nature" on the other, who stand "in the middle" between the two alternative elections to grace and to reprobation. Schottroff has suggested that the Valentinians may have introduced this characterization of the psychics into an earlier twofold election-schema of grace and reprobation in her words "as a concession to the church".[47] Their view of the psychic nature, as the provisional condition (τῆς οἰκονομίας) of "those in the middle" does enable the Valentinians both to affirm the validity of the psychic preaching, and simultaneously to indicate its limitations.

The polemicists Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen, however, interpret the Valentinian description of the three "natures" substantively, as evidence that the gnostics teach "determinism". Clement says that they teach that

[47] Schottroff, 93.

some are "saved by nature", and others "lost by nature".[48] In short, he gives a polemical turn to the phrase so that, in his description, it implies not election as its presupposition but determinism. Irenaeus makes the same implication when he says that the gnostics claim to be "pneumatic by nature". This shows, he adds, their arrogance and their contempt for "good works" – for "they claim to be perfect and elect", and to have "received grace as their own special possession".[49] Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen become instrumental in developing the counter-theory of *autexousia* – "free will" along with philosophic arguments for the universality of human freedom – to contradict the gnostics' alleged "determinism". If one were to adopt this philosophic framework, one could agree that Valentinian anthropology is "deterministic" – but only in the sense that it presupposes divine election.

What can this analysis offer for the interpretation of other texts, such as those from Nag Hammadi? We suggest, first, that it offers clues for interpreting specific passages in other texts related to Valentinian tradition. Three examples may be mentioned:

1. The use of technical terms to designate what is *psychic* and *pneumatic* respectively (i.e., the terms "Jew"/"Hebrew", "Gentile"/"Christian" (as in the *Ev. Phil.*); the terminology of the "names", of "those who are" and "those who have not yet become" (in *Ev. Ver.*); the terms "cosmos" and "anthropos"; the phrases "from faith"/"through faith", the "two covenants", or "two circumcisions" (as the latter occurs in *Ev. Thom.*).
2. This analysis should also serve to elucidate gnostic reference to the Pauline letters (as in *Ev. Thom.*, *Ev. Ver.*) by suggesting an exegetical context.
3. It should elucidate the function of OT figures (Abraham/Moses/Jacob, etc.) as references to the *demiurge* in texts related to Valentinian tradition.

Secondly, this analysis criticizes the current discussion of gnostic anthropology, and suggests an alternative approach to the interpretation of the three "natures". Bultmann, Langerbeck, and Schottroff, who discuss the Valentinian view of "natures" in terms of the antithesis between "determinism" and "free will" focus their discussion on philosophic categories developed in anti-gnostic polemics. These categories neither occur in the gnostic texts themselves, nor do they reflect the concerns of Valentinian theologians.

The terminology of the three "natures", as it is used in the Valentinian exegesis of *Romans*, is intended to interpret Pauline anthropology. The three designations (psychic/hylic/pneumatic) express the different relations of men to the divine election:

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[48] *Exc.* 56.3–4.

[49] Iren. *Adv. haer.* 1.1.11–12; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 2.10–2.

1. The term "psychic nature", then, characterizes those who are not elected, but stand provisionally "in the middle" between the alternative elections to grace and reprobation. They are the "called", who receive a capacity for attaining salvation "according to works".
2. The term "hylic nature" characterizes those elected to reprobation, who can also be called "lost natures".
3. The term "pneumatic nature" characterizes those who, being the "elect of God", through the will of the Father, receive a "certain" and "imperishable" redemption "according to grace".

APPENDIX

Valentinian hermeneutics proceed according to their technical interpretation of certain "scriptural" terms. The following examples from *Rom.* 1–5 indicate which Pauline terms they interpret as referring to *psychics* (col. 1) and which to *pneumatics* (col. 2) These are grouped according to their designation of the *persons* (*psychics/pneumatics*), the *process* (*salvation/redemption*), and the *deity* (*demiurge/God the Father*).

PSYCHIC	PNEUMATIC
I. The persons: *psychics*	*pneumatics*
Rm. 2.28: the "*Jew externally*" has "circumcision of *flesh*" which is "*literal*"	2.29: the "*Jew in secret*" receives "circumcision of the *heart*" which is "*pneumatic*"
1.14: the "*Barbarians*", the "*foolish*"	1.14: the "*Greeks*", the "*wise*"
1.16; 2.17, etc.: the "*Jew*"	1.5; 1.13, etc.: the "*Gentile*"
3.30: "the *circumcision*"	3.30: "the *uncircumcision*"
4.14: "heirs from the law"	4.16: "*the entire seed*"
II. The process: *salvation* (σωτηρία)	*redemption* (ἀπολύτρωσις)
Rm. 2.17: the "Jew" relies "on the law"	2.14: the "Gentiles, not having the law, do by nature (φύσει) what it prescribes":
2.25: the "*circumcision*" must observe "the law"	2.27: the one "by nature" "*uncircumcised*" (ἡ ἐκ φύσεως ἀκροβυστία) "completes the law"
2.12; 3.19: they are "*in the law*"	2.12: are "*without law*"
8.2: the law "of sin and death"	2.14: yet "themselves are law"
3.20: their "consciousness of sin" comes *externally*, "through the law"	2.15: they "receive the effect of the law written in their hearts" *internally* "their conscience witnesses to it"
3.23: psychics "all have sinned"	3.23: pneumatics have "lacked God's glory"
	(5.13: "sin is not accounted apart from law")
	3.24: they are "justified by his *grace* freely through the *redemption* in Christ"
3.6: psychics are "the *cosmos*" which is to be "judged"	3.28: pneumatic is the "*anthropos*" whom God justifies "apart from the works of the law" (δικαιοῦσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου.)
3.19: the psychic "*cosmos*" is liable to the judgment	
3.27: psychics justified by "*law of works*"	3.27: pneum. justified by "*law of faith*"

	3.30: "the *circumcised*" are justified "*from faith*" (ἐκ πίστεως)	3.30: "*uncircumcised*" are justified "*through faith*" (διὰ τῆς πίστεως)
	4.2: psychics also justified "*from works*"	
	4.4: psychic is "*the one who works*"; his "*wages*" (μισθός) are accounted as "*his due*" (κατὰ ὀφείλημα)	4.5: pneumatic is "*the one who does not work*", but whose "*faith is accounted for righteousness*" by "*grace*" (4.4)
	4.7: psychics "*iniquities* forgiven", their "*sins* are covered"	4.8: pneumatic is the "*anthropos*" to whom "the Lord will not impute sin"
III.	The deity: *the demiurge*	*God the Father*
Rm.	3.29: the "God of the Jews"	3.29: "God of the Gentiles", the "One God"
	1.23: the "image" (εἰκών)	1.23: the "glory of the Incorruptible God"
	1.25: the "lie" (τὸ ψεῦδος) the "creation" (κτίσις) (cf. *Exc.* 47)	1.25: "truth" (ἀλήθεια) of God the "creator who is blessed among aions"
	1.3; 4.6: "David": 5.14, "Moses": 4.1f.: "Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh"	1.7: "God our Father", the "Uningendered"
		4.3; 4.17: "God in whom Abraham believed"

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